

MERCER STREET FRIENDS BRINGS FIRST COMMUNITY SCHOOL TO TRENTON

Initiative Awarded a \$2.3 Million Federal Education Grant

After three years of planning and preparation, the Rivera Middle School opened its doors on September 8, 2015 as the first community school in Trenton.

Community schools recognize that what goes on in the home and in the streets affects learning as much as what goes on in the classroom. Community schools support, integrate and intersect the academic and nonacademic needs of students and their families. A community school connects classroom instruction with expanded learning opportunities for students and families (after school, weekends, and summer) and provides health, mental health and social services to promote the well-being of students and families.

Over the past three years, Mercer Street Friends has built the partnerships and relationships to bring the community school to reality. This involved discussions with school district officials followed by a formal agreement with the Trenton Board of Education; designation of the Rivera School as the site to pilot the initiative; introducing the community school concept at group meetings and individual one-on-one discussions; hosting a roundtable with executive directors of area nonprofits to plant the seeds for future collaborations; garnering financial support; forming an implementation team at the school that includes the principal, school staff and MSF staff; conducting a



Rivera Middle School

needs assessment among students and parents and hosting and participating in varied school events as a way of getting Rivera School students and parents to know us.

We have to be thinking about children, families, communities AND the systems that impact them. We have to be in conversation with the broader community about our common challenges and what is working elsewhere. We have to be willing to stretch. This community schools initiative is all of that, and so much more. As service providers, we often start off with discussions of what is lacking. The community schools conversation starts by asking, "What is present?"

Shannon Mason,
MSF Executive Director

Vital to the process has been the support and enthusiasm of Rivera School principal Bernadette Trapp. She has provided office and program space for the Community School Coordinator Anneisha Walker (who heads Mercer Street Friends Youth Services division) and her staff. They are now permanently planted and housed at the school.

"A school should be the hub of the community, a place where ALL stakeholders feel welcome and safe. It is my hope that with our partnership with Mercer Street Friends, Rivera Middle School will become such a school. ALL stakeholders should be provided opportunities for learning, engagement, and socialization.

continued on next page

Dear Friends,

It has been nearly three years since I took the helm at Mercer Street Friends. Prior to accepting this position, I had been asking a few questions. Namely: What does this organization do extraordinarily well? What did we learn from the West Ward Alliance's listening campaign? What meaningful change is happening in other communities? How is that change coming about?

Add to this mix a friend of our mission Nina Altschiller's impassioned advocacy that "Trenton needs community schools!" She would not let her answer go and my questions would not let me go. As Divine Providence would have it, the two were made for each other.

Once I caught the vision, my question became, "With so many challenges and pressures, how do I convince the board and staff that this is the 'more' that we must do?" It was work. It took time. There were missteps. Eventually, we all got there.

We adopted the community schools initiative as the focus of our strategic plan. We celebrated. The only thing missing was, well, funding. I thought, "Now, that I have convinced them to do this, we have to find a way to actually do this!"

The initial disappointments were hard ones. Those, however, made the email that much sweeter. It was the U.S. Department of Education. They were offering us \$2.3 million over the course of five years to support our full service community school implementation. Now, we would be able to breathe. But first, tears.

This is such a great moment in our organizational life. We are re-inventing ourselves. We are emerging stronger. Most importantly, we are glad to have you on this journey with us.

Onward,
Shannon M. Mason, Ph.D.

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Once these opportunities become the norm, not just during but also outside of traditional school hours, we will begin to fulfill the goal of Rivera/Mercer Street Friends Community School."

Bernadette Trapp,
Rivera School Principal

MSF Awarded a \$2.3 Million U.S. Department of Education Full Service Community Schools Implementation Grant

With much pride and joy, Mercer Street Friends announces receipt of this highly competitive five year grant from the U.S. Department of Education that will provide underpinning support for the initiative. The grant targets the following five core services:

- Assistance to students who have been chronically absent, truant, suspended, or expelled
- Family engagement, including parent training and parental involvement activities
- Mental health services
- Mentoring and other youth development programs

- Access to other community-based social service programs

Utilizing the expertise of our Youth Services staff, we have begun individual and group counseling and brought our highly regarded youth enrichment/development program into the school. The Food Bank is providing 50 Send Hunger Packing weekend meal packs as well as a weekly donation of produce to address food insecurity.

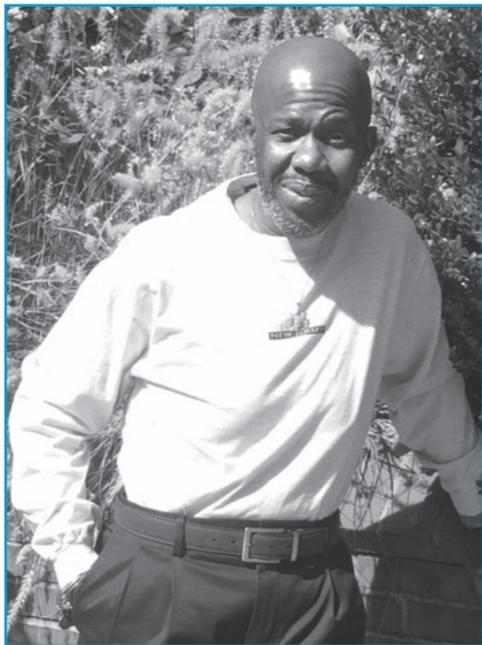
We are also coordinating all the after school programs that are conducted in the facility by Mercer Street Friends and other community agencies and building our presence and visibility among students and their families. Other outreach services to be added this school year include a Parental Stress Reduction Program and providing computers and links to the internet through the Trenton Digital Initiative.

Through a sizeable donation of used desks, cabinets, bookcases, tables, chairs and sofas from Princeton University Surplus Equipment Program and the labor of MSF staff and interns, rooms within the Rivera School are being painted, outfitted and organized to create a welcoming place for students and families. ■



Jessica Hammond, Senior Youth Counselor and Rivera Middle School Student Shyonn Wright

A ROAD TRIP THROUGH TRENTON'S PAST AND PRESENT



At 61, James “Butter” Allen is a dynamic and forthright man. A life-long Trenton resident, Butter has lived in different parts of the capital city over the years, finally settling as an adult in a cozy West Trenton neighborhood.

As a member of the Mercer Street Friends Board of Trustees, Butter realized he had a unique role to play in helping fellow board members understand the challenges – economic, structural, political and social – that organizations like Mercer Street Friends face in serving the Trenton community.

Rather than simply try to explain these challenges at board meetings, Butter decided to show the board members some of the realities of the city by taking them on a tour of Trenton.

“People on this board have generous hearts. And they have no idea what they are up against in Trenton,” Butter says with a slight shake of his head and a rueful smile.

Butter’s tour ignores the landmarks that most people see when they visit Trenton like the Old Barracks Museum and the State Capitol. Instead, Butter shows them the abandoned iron, steel, porcelain and rubber factories that were once the

heart of the neighborhoods that grew up around them. “My goal is to show board members today’s Trenton, and to give them some idea of just how much it has changed,” he explains.

Butter drives into some of the city’s roughest neighborhoods and describes what they were in his childhood. In one area, the now-dilapidated homes used to belong to black middle-class and professional families: doctors, lawyers and business owners. He paints a vivid picture of a black middle class and working class with strong connections to their communities.

“The economic shifts in Trenton are the root of all the other shifts it has experienced.”

“The economic shifts in Trenton are the root of all the other shifts it has experienced,” Butter remarks, “When the factory jobs left, more than just the people who worked in those factories lost their jobs.”

Butter goes on to describe how many service sector jobs were held by black people who lost their livelihood as well when the factory workers and managers left in search of new jobs when the factories closed. His own family experienced this financial destabilization when the factories in Trenton closed and his mother lost her job working in the home of a factory manager.

For awhile, Butter’s family lived in Miller Homes, but at that time, even the “projects” were different. Butter describes a very different Miller Homes than the one many people envision when you say the word “projects.”

In high school, Butter moved to the Wilbur Section of Trenton, near Trenton Central High (TCH). “At that time,

TCH was an excellent school and the surrounding neighborhoods were nice,” Butter says. In high school, he was part of the Upward Bound Program, which identifies promising students and helps them prepare to attend college.

Butter received his undergraduate and later, a Master’s Degree, from Trenton State (now known as The College of New Jersey).

When asked why he feels the tours are important, Butter says that he thinks that it is important for people to get behind the mission of Mercer Street Friends – Bridging opportunity gaps... helping families and communities make the journey out of poverty.”

Then Butter clarifies his point by saying, “Poverty doesn’t just mean that you are hungry for food; you are also hungry for knowledge and for access to things that you hear about but have never experienced.” ■

A ROAD MAP FOR THE FUTURE

One way to assure that Mercer Street Friends remains a viable organization in years to come is to become a Steward of the Mission, a group of committed supporters who have included the organization in their wills and estate plans. By doing so, they fulfill their philanthropic goals as they also help assure Mercer Street Friends stability into the future.

Bequests to Mercer Street Friends are entirely free from federal estate tax, and there is no limit on the amount you can leave to Mercer Street Friends. Planned giving may include gifts of appreciated securities, life insurance, real estate, charitable trusts and bequests.

For information about becoming a Steward of the Mission, contact Phyllis Stoolmacher, Director of Advancement. ■



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- Stop & Shop – *Hunger Prevention*
- TJX Foundation – *Hunger Prevention*
- NRG Energy – *Food Bank Capacity Building*
- Bloomberg Philanthropies – *Hunger Prevention*
- Princeton Area Community Foundation – *Hunger Prevention*
- The Charitable Exchange – *Hunger Prevention*
- Goldie B. Rojer Hunger Relief Fund at the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Mercer – *Hunger Prevention*
- Janssen Pharmaceuticals – *Hunger Prevention*
- Church & Dwight Employee Giving Fund – *Hunger Prevention*

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITY TO END HUNGER:



“CHALLAH FOR HUNGER”

Phyllis Stoolmacher, Acting Food Bank Director (*third on right*) and Brian Peterson, Community Resource Liaison (*fifth on right*) joined with Princeton University students at the Center for Jewish Life to make “Challah for Hunger”. Proceeds from the monthly sale of Challah for Hunger are donated to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank. ■

THE TRENTON DIGITAL INITIATIVE (TDI)



Some of the friends and supporters of the Trenton Digital Initiative (TDI) who gathered at River Horse Brewery on October 21 for a fundraiser to benefit the program.

The Trenton Digital Initiative (TDI) is a collaboration among Mercer Street Friends, Trenton Rotary, Mid-Jersey Chamber of Commerce, Comcast, the United Way and other interested people to provide free home computers to low-income Trenton families and connect them to the internet.

TDI volunteers collect donations of used computers, wipe out all data and install a free operating system, called Ubuntu,

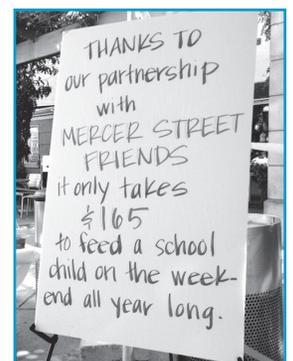
compatible with the current Microsoft Office. The computers are then installed in homes of Trenton families receiving services from Mercer Street Friends and linked to the internet through Comcast’s low-cost Internet Essentials.

The program is administered by and housed at Mercer Street Friends. For more information on how to donate computers or volunteer, contact TDI@mercerstreetfriends.org. ■



PRINCETON HUNGER BANQUET

“I took a seat at the table to take a stand against hunger”. This was the message sent by the attendees at the Princeton Hunger Banquet, held on Sunday, September 20 to raise money for Send Hunger Packing Princeton, a collaboration among Mercer Street Friends, Princeton Human Services Commission and Princeton Public schools. The diners were randomly placed at tables and served a meal reflective of low, middle or high income earners. The event raised funds for the weekend meals provided by the Food Bank and awareness about hunger in Princeton. ■



WHAT'S A NECTARINE?



This was asked by a youngster at the Urban Promise Learning Lab summer program who had never seen this fruit before. Unfortunately, for children growing up in a “food desert” with little access to fresh fruits and vegetables, this is not an uncommon question.

So, when Stacy Mongold, who administers the Food Bank’s **summer feeding program**, heard what the young camper had said, she scoured around the Food Bank and collected an assortment of nutrition education learning tools targeted for children and brought them to the site. The next time a nectarine appeared on the lunch tray, it was gobbled up.

“We had another little boy who only ate chicken nuggets and pizza, now he tries everything and is eating more at home.”

The importance of summer feeding was well articulated in this letter we received from Donna Marie Clancy, CYO of Mercer County.

I wanted to tell you what a wonderful experience the summer feeding program was for both our staff and the children who came each day to eat. Working with Stacy was great. She has such a sweet personality and was very easy to work with. We did “Try it Thursdays” where the kids had to at least try everything on their plate. Many of the kids found out that they like carrot sticks, cucumbers, and more. One mother came into my office to thank me because her child would never eat fruit and now he has her buying him plums and apples. We had another little boy who only ate chicken nuggets and pizza, now he tries everything and is eating more at home.

Debbie [Bronfeld] also worked with us with the kid packs for the weekends. They were a huge hit! They kids would remind me as soon as they came in on Fridays that it was the day for their kid packs. Debbie made the entire process of picking up the packs smooth and easy.

I thank Mercer Street Friends for sponsoring the CYO Bromley Center this summer. I look forward to working with you and your staff again next summer. ■

MSF FOOD BANK VOLUNTEER COUNTS

August 2015 to October 2015

Visits by Volunteers..... **385**

Number of Hours..... **1,134**

Thank you to the following groups for helping in the warehouse during this period.

- Alpha Phi Omega – TCNJ
- Bank of America – Merrill Lynch Campus
- Berkshire Hathaway Home Services Fox & Roach
- Bloomberg
- Cadwalader Asbury United Methodist Church
- Credit Suisse
- Dawn of Hope, Inc.
- Epicor
- ETS Cares
- Foundation Academy
- Grunwell Family
- Hilton Garden Inn, Hampton Inn and Homewood suites
- HMS Permedon
- Integrichain
- Janssen Pharmaceuticals
- Lend Lease
- Morgan Stanley – Private Wealth Management
- New and Living Way Ministries
- NJ Manufacturers
- Notre Dame High School
- Princeton University Community Action Arts Team
- Princeton University Community Action Hunger Team
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- SERV
- Takeda
- TCNJ Bonner Garden Crew
- TCNJ Green Campus Partnership
- TCNJ Health Team & Delta Phi Epsilon
- TCNJ Pre-College Program
- US Trust
- Wegmans Management Team

If you would like to volunteer, please call the Food Bank at 609-406-0503.



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DON'T FORGET TO CHECK-OUT HUNGER®

It is that time of year to Check-Out Hunger® – the annual supermarket based campaign to raise funds for New Jersey’s food banks.

Check-Out Hunger® runs every year from late September through the end of January at varying times at participating stores over the four-month period. Shoppers can donate wherever they see the Check-Out Hunger® displays.

100% of donations made in Mercer County come to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank. Participating stores in our service area are: Marrazzo’s, McCaffrey’s, Pennington Quality Market, QuickChek, Risoldi’s, ShopRite, Wawa and Wegmans.

Shoppers wishing to make a donation simply tear off the donation slip located near the register, hand the slip to the cashier where it is scanned like any other purchase. The donation is simply added to the grocery bill and appears on the receipt. It is as easy as buying a loaf of bread.

Donations made at stores outside our service area are directed to another member of the NJ Federation of Food Banks: Community FoodBank of New Jersey, FoodBank of Monmouth & Ocean Counties, NORWESCAP Food Bank and Food Bank of South Jersey. ■



FriendsTalk

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Dave Zboray

A PUBLICATION OF MERCER STREET FRIENDS

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